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AUTHOR Slaughter, Judith P.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Designed to reinforce initial training and to provide a collection of useful ideas for students who serve as peer tutors, this guidebook provides tips for tutors to improve the reading abilities. Following an introduction which asserts the benefits of peer tutoring programs, the guidebook is divided into two major sections: "Tutoring Targets" and "Steps to Success." The first section offers the tutor basic suggestions for establishing positive relationships with tutees, and strategies for teaching and evaluating. Subjects discussed in the first part include tutor characteristics, the learning environment, helpful strategies, and evaluation of the tutoring session. The second section presents activities for improving vocabulary (by using the dictionary, checking the context, and analyzing the parts of words) and reading comprehension (by sizing up, digging in, looking back, and perusing the introduction or preface of a book). The guidebook also discusses highlighting and offering help to students. (Sixteen references are included.) (PRA)

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A Guidebook for the Peer Tutor

Tips for Tutoring:
Improving Reading Abilities

Judith P. Slaughter

Heidi Blaukopf

Kathy Toohy

McGill University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Abstract

Studies have demonstrated, time after time, that peer tutoring can be an effective way to increase the reading performance of students in need. The coaching experience can prove equally rewarding to those students who have volunteered to be tutors.

Peer tutoring programs work better when there is a support system, enabling tutors to obtain help and advise as they work with their tutees. Often, however, the teachers involved in tutorial programs are too busy with other professional commitments to offer much assistance . Tips for Tutors: Improving Reading Abilities is a Guidebook that has been designed to reinforce the initial training and to provide a collection of useful ideas for the students who serve as peer tutors.

A Guidebook for the Peer Tutor

Tips for Tutoring: Improving Reading Abilities

Peer tutoring is a form of collaborative learning that often proves as rewarding and as beneficial for the tutor as for the tutee. An array of programs have been established at all levels of education to assist students-in-need; at the later elementary, secondary and post secondary levels many successful programs utilize peer tutoring arrangements. Student tutors are selected not because they have achieved perfect academic records, but because they possess maturity and are willing to work with others (Beck, 1978). This educational collaboration provides the weaker student with a one to one relationship which may prove more effective than remedial classes managed by trained instructors. Rauch (1985) reasons, "In many instances, the understanding and sensitivity of the tutor to the problems of the adolescent or adult far outweigh that tutor's lack of knowledge about specific reading techniques" (p. 2).

Often the personal attention and interest from a fellow student will enable a weaker student to perform better. Peer tutoring programs have demonstrated their effectiveness with respect to student gains in academic achievement, as well as in self concept (Hawkins, 1978; Banta & Lawson, 1980). A tutor seems to provide a student in need with an accessible model. Beck (1978) explains, "Tutees can hope to emulate the skills of their peers, while those of their professors sometimes seem hopelessly beyond them" (p. 439). As the development of literacy is a social process, a collaborative learning format is particularly effective (Radebaugh & Kazemek, 1989). They maintain that, ". . . meaning from texts is fostered at all age levels through social interaction and the social

construction of meaning" (p. 415).

Mature learners can experience difficulty with academic work for a number of reasons. Traditional teaching methods may have failed them. They may have had interruptions in their schooling. For many of these students, English is their second language. Others are stymied by the anxiety of a new educational environment; academic pressures can be very threatening. Mature students also have needs different from younger learners. They are highly motivated; and they experience enormous satisfaction with the academic gains they realize (Mocker, 1980). They have a wealth of experiences to which they can relate new information. Through collaborative learning, a peer tutor can address their individual problems and can relate to their unique experiences very effectively.

Skill in tutoring does not come automatically, even to very capable students. Ideas for initial training sessions are presented in Training and Using Peer Tutors (Beck, Hawkins & Silver, 1978). In addition, weekly meetings can be organized by the program director to review the progress of the students in need and to offer suggestions. Round table sessions with other tutors facilitate an exchange of teaching ideas. This backing is in fact similar to the support tutors offer their tutees. Guidebooks can also provide invaluable support for the tutors.

Tips for Tutoring: Improving Reading Abilities, presented below, is a guide book for tutors designed to reinforce training and to provide a collection of useful ideas. Part I offers the tutor basic suggestions for establishing positive relationships with the students-in-need. Strategies for teaching and evaluating are presented as well. Part II has separate sections for vocabulary development and comprehension, initially utilizing

textual materials familiar to the tutee, then relating the strategies to textbooks and reading materials. The last part gives advice on addressing specific problems and in helping the tutee become more independent.

Tips for Tutoring has been implemented with peer tutors at a local college. Revisions based on tutor's comments have been made to the guidebook. The tutors have reported considerable satisfaction in using this handbook, finding the strategies and the ideas " . . . clear and comprehensible", ". . . very worthwhile", and ". . . very much on the mark, especially for improving the learner's self confidence." Tips for Tutoring should prove a useful tool in this collaborative learning experience.

TIPS FOR TUTORING:

Improving Reading Abilities

FORWARD

Dear Tutor:

You are embarking on a challenging and rewarding collaborative learning experience . . . that of peer tutoring.

Tutoring programs are one of the most successful ways to help students succeed academically. Equally importantly, peer tutoring will reap great rewards for you--the tutor ! You will gain a personal satisfaction from helping a fellow student, and your own knowledge and skills will be enhanced. You will have an opportunity to extend your interpersonal communication. You will receive guidance and gain experience in using different teaching methods and educational materials.

Your greatest accomplishment however will be to provide your tutee with a dedicated, committed and successful role model and friend. After all, you will be the one who will be providing one-to-one assistance to another student who, in turn, will realize an improvement in scholastic achievement and an increase in self-confidence.

Good luck on your new adventure !

PART I

TUTORING TARGETS

Many students find it extremely difficult to cope with the academic demands of college life. A variety of reasons could explain this difficulty. The student may never have developed proper study habits or adequate reading skills. He or she may not have been shown how to use a library or how to find information in reference materials. He or she may have had changes in lifestyle or inturruptions in school. This student may just need a helping hand.

A The Tutor

The success of peer tutoring programs might rely on a number of factors, but the most important component is the attitude and behavior of you, the tutor. The following characteristics are what a good tutor should possess in order to be effective:

1. enthusiasm
2. a genuine interest in helping others
3. reliablity and conscientiousness
4. the ability to communicate with others
5. a commitment to the tutee - giving the student undivided

attention

6. confidence that tutee will improve
7. patience
8. a view that each tutee is a unique individual who brings to each session his or her background experiences, fears and hopes.

B The Learning Environment

It is extremely important that the tutoring sessions be held in an environment conducive to learning. In order to minimize distractions and yet maintain an informal but challenging environment, keep these two points in mind:

1. Tutoring should not be done in high traffic areas in the college. An empty classroom works well.
2. Ideally, you should work at a table and sit next to the learner so you can both see the materials easily.

C Strategies That Help

1. Encourage your student to tell you about himself or herself and to tell you what his or her interests are.
2. Look for reading materials that reflect your student's interests. If your student is an avid sports fan or has a particular hobby, then bring in articles about hockey or stamp collecting (for example) to use for these lessons. School publications and the local newspaper will also provide excellent materials for reading lessons.
3. Focus on the strengths and not on the weaknesses of the tutee.
4. Use positive reinforcement continuously. Say, "Let's try this one again", instead of, "No, that's wrong."

5. Allow sufficient time for students to solve a problem, or to answer a question.
6. Tutoring sessions should be held on a regular basis. If there is a need to cancel, notified your tutee in advance.

D Evaluation of the Tutoring Session

At the end of every session, take a few minutes to reflect and evaluate what you have done during your session.

1. Keep a tutoring log, using a form similar to the one below.

PEER TUTORING PROGRESS REPORT

Name of tutee:* Date:*

Problems needing attention:*

Description of activities used during session* Results

Evaluation and comments:

Ideas for the next session:

The sections with the asterisks should be completed before the tutoring session.

2. To evaluate your own effectiveness, read back over your log periodically. You may notice ways to make these lessons more helpful for your tutee.
3. Be sure to ask for feedback from your tutee on a continual basis; ask him or her what procedures seem to be working.

PART II

STEPS TO SUCCESS

Each tutoring session could be divided into three parts. During the first part of the session, you might help your student improve his or her vocabulary. Next, your attention could be focused on reading and comprehending text materials more effectively. Sections B and C present ideas for improving reading comprehension. The last part of every session should be reserved for the tutee to ask you questions. During this time you will be able to give your tutee immediate assistance where it's needed and when it's wanted.

On the first or second session, take your student for a tour around the college library.

1. Show your tutee how to use the card catalogue or the computer system to locate specific books.
2. Find where the periodicals and the magazines are kept.
3. Help your student learn how to use indexes to track down articles on particular subjects.
4. Locate the reference materials: the dictionary, the encyclopedias, and anything else you think might be useful to your student.
5. Repeat any of these steps when your tutee has to find specific information to write a term paper or to work on a project.

A Words and More Words

Helping your student improve his vocabulary can be a very profitable experience for both of you. Strong word skills are an enormous asset in every academic area, as well as in the work force. If you show an

interest in learning new words, then this will be passed along to your tutee. Below are some strategies to use.

THE BASIC TOOL - THE DICTIONARY

Take a few minutes during the beginning of your sessions to examine the dictionary with your tutee. The front part (that which comes before the A-Z listing) and the back part (that which follows the listings) explaining how you can make the best use of your dictionary.

In the front of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, for example, there are explanations to help you analyze a word's pronunciation, to recognize which words are used only as slang, and to look up abbreviations. At the back there is a list of frequently used foreign words and phrases with their English meanings; a biographical dictionary; explanations of many of the signs and symbols used in mathematics and sciences; and even some sections to help you to write better.

WINDFALL OF WORDS

Prepare a binder of 26 sheets of paper, one for each letter of the alphabet. To start this activity, ask your student to list a few unknown words that he or she has encountered. You will want to add some tricky words that have puzzled you. Look up each word in the dictionary. Read the definition and try to create a simpler definition that is easier to remember. Then use the word in a sentence. Jot down the word, the abbreviated definition, and the sentence onto the correct page in the binder.

Encourage your students to add unfamiliar words as they come across these in their readings. The vocabulary binder becomes a type of "personal dictionary" and students can more confidently use the new words

in their discussions and assignments.

At every session you and your tutee can review old words and complete the entries for the new words. You could make a game of this activity and quiz each other. You will both be surprised how quickly your vocabularies increase.

CONTEXT CLUES - QUICK STEP 1

When students are able to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word through its use in a sentence, they can make sense of the reading without always taking the time right then to look up the word in the dictionary. To help your student take advantage of "context clues", practice these steps.

1. Skip over the unknown word and finish reading the sentence. Try to determine the meaning from the rest of the words.
2. If you still don't understand the word, go back one or two sentences and reread the section.
3. If the definition is still not clear, read on and try to understand the entire meaning of the paragraph and then estimate the meaning of the word again.
4. After you finish your reading, copy the word in the vocabulary binder and look the word up in the dictionary for the exact meaning.

WORD BITS AND PIECES - QUICK STEP 2

You can often figure out what a word means by analyzing parts of the word. It is helpful to know the meanings of a few of the more common prefixes, suffixes, and roots. Walter Pauk's book, How to Study

in College, second edition, published by Houghton Mifflin, 1974, contains some examples of common prefixes and roots on page 89 and 90.

When an unknown word contains prefixes and suffixes, check the meanings of these first. When you combine this strategy with context clues, you can often grasp a fairly accurate meaning of the word.

B Read and Remember

Here is a procedure that can help your students to read with understanding; and to remember the facts and ideas.

To practice the procedure, select reading material that interests your tutee and that is fairly easy to handle. Newspaper or magazine articles are ideal. After your student has had practice with a number of articles and is comfortable with the procedure, apply the steps to college textbooks that he or she is using.

SIZING UP

1. Read the title and the introduction or first paragraph carefully. What do you think the author has written about in the rest of the article? Make some predictions.
2. Now read the last paragraph, as key concepts and topics are often summarized. Revise your predictions about the author's intentions.
3. Skim quickly through the article, focusing on boldface headings. Diagrams, graphs and pictures should also be noted as they often illustrate key points.
4. Think about the information you have read. What do you already know about the topic? Have you read something recently about it? Ask yourself a series of questions about the topic and jot

these down.

DIGGING IN

1. You have already read the introduction so skip over it. If the article is long, divide it in parts and follow steps 2, 3, and 4 with each part.
2. Read the article, paragraph by paragraph, looking for main ideas and supporting details.
3. Read to answer the questions you posed earlier, to see if your predictions about the author's intent were close.
4. Jot down a summary of some key points in the article. Continue in the same way with the other sections in the article.

LOOKING BACK

1. Read the conclusion again, then reread the headings.
2. Skim over the entire article again to recall the main points.
3. Read over your own comments and add to these if necessary. Make sure you have included all the main ideas.

C Into Books

A textbook can be very intimidating to some students. Many times they feel overwhelmed by its enormous size and its wealth of information. Fortunately, there is a way of helping students feel more at ease with their textbook and, at the same time, enhance their comprehension of the material.

Ask your tutee to bring a textbook that he or she finds difficult. During the session apply the following techniques.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

1. Read the preface or the introduction of the textbook carefully.

You will be able to gather background information on the author. The purpose and the main themes will be outlined. You might discover some useful tips on how to read the text more efficiently.

2. Read over the Table of Contents to determine if the material is arranged according to topics or chronological order. Focus on the main topics and sub-topics of each chapter.
3. Glance at the Index and Glossary contained at the end of the text.
4. Take a few extra minutes to read the summaries found at the end of one or two chapters.
5. Reflect upon what you have gleaned. What do you already know about some of the topics that are presented in the textbook?

READ AND REMEMBER

With this helpful orientation to the entire textbook, you are now ready to tackle the first chapter. Follow the procedure suggested earlier: SIZING UP, DIGGING IN, and LOOKING BACK. This procedure might seem long and tedious at first, but once you become familiar with it, you will comprehend the text so much better. The results will be well worth the time and effort !

SIZING UP

1. Read the introduction, then the conclusion.
2. Skim quickly through the chapter, focusing on boldface headings, diagrams, graphs and pictures.
3. Guess what the author will be trying to convey. What do you already know about this area? Ask yourself questions about the topic or turn the subheadings into questions. Jot these down.

DIGGING IN

1. Divide the chapter into sections and complete these four steps with each section. Read the first section, paragraph by paragraph, looking for main ideas and supporting details.
2. As you read pause to think about the questions you jotted down earlier.
3. When you have finished one section, go back and underline or highlight* the main points and supporting materials. Then jot down a summary and your own comments in the margin or in your notebook.
4. Answer, briefly, the questions you developed.

LOOKING BACK

1. Read the conclusion and introduction again.
2. Review the headings, the points you underlined, your own summaries and comments, and the answers to the questions. Make more notes if necessary.
3. Repeat steps 1 and 2 in **LOOKING BACK** several days later and again just before an exam. Don't forget this procedure; the extra time you spend will really pay off !

HIGHLIGHTING *

As you are reading the chapter in your textbook, you should be looking for important ideas and details. These should be highlighted either by underlining, using a highlighter, or placing an asterisk in the margin. Marking enables you to identify certain points so that you can easily find them again when you study.

One of the most obvious questions your tutee will have is, "How do I

know what is important?" The following are keys to what is important in a textbook chapter:

1. definitions
2. words that have been italicized or appear in bold print
3. ideas following "signal" words; for example: contrary to . . , in conclusion . . , therefore . . , as a result . . , thus . . , etc.
4. ideas that answer the questions you jotted down when you were **SIZING UP**

In addition each subheading may be turned into a question. The answer to these question will certainly be important information and should be highlighted.

D <u>HELP</u> WHERE IT'S NEEDED

Ask your student to talk about problems that he or she is having with the courses at college. A tutor should spend a part of each session on questions and concerns that the tutee has. You might be able to help your tutee understand an assignment more clearly. Often talking over problems will help your student clarify the expectations and identify the ways to proceed.

Eventually, this part of the tutorial session might occupy more time than any other section. Always ask your students how they would attack the problems they have identified. You will help them gradually to develop their own strategies for handling their problems. You want your tutee to be able to work more and more independently. The more successful you are, the less you will be needed--in effect, you will be working yourself out of a job !

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